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**LETTERS
TO A MOTHER
BY BISHOP MEADE**



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Book M4

PRESENTED BY

LETTERS
TO A
MOTHER
ON THE
BIRTH OF A CHILD,

In which are set forth the feelings most proper on that occasion ;—
the private dedication—the public baptism—and
future training of the child—

WITH AN APPENDIX,

In which the leading 'views of the baptismal service are considered, and it is shown how the same may be used
without scruple and unto edification.

BY THE
RIGHT REV. WILLIAM MEADE, D. D.



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PREFACE.

If it be asked, why these letters are addressed to a Mother rather than to a Father, or to both ; it is answered, because, in point of fact, and in a great measure of necessity, the early religious education of children devolves chiefly on the mother.

If it be asked, why the child is supposed to be a son rather than a daughter ; it is answered, because sons are necessarily exposed to much greater danger and temptation.

If it be asked, why a first-born is selected rather than any other ; it is answered, because the feelings of mothers are apt to be more holy and tender on the birth of a first-born, and it is hoped that by a reference to that occasion the same feelings will be reawakened in those who may read the following pages on the birth of any subsequent child.



LETTERS TO A MOTHER ON THE BIRTH OF A CHILD.

MY DEAR FRIEND :

A FEW days since, and you became a mother—the joyful mother of your first born, over whom you are even now perhaps, hanging with such feelings as none but a mother's heart can know. God has fulfilled to you a most gracious promise made to poor woman, and saved you in the hour of great fear and need. Now, if ever, your heart is overwhelmed at the thought of your deliverance; and ascribing it altogether to the divine goodness, you are ready to say in the language of thanksgiving which the Church in her service for this occasion has put into your lips, “I am well pleased that the Lord hath heard the voice of my prayer. What shall I render unto the Lord for all the benefits bestowed upon me?” In such a frame of mind you will, I am sure, permit a friend who wishes to lead your thoughts towards the right improvement of so interesting an event, to take advantage of your pre-

sent feelings, and address you a few words of counsel.

At your side, or in your arms, there lies a poor helpless form, scarce alive, and which would soon perish but for a mother's care. Within that frail form however, there is a deathless soul, and the being on whom you now look so tenderly is destined to be one day and for ever, either an angel of Heaven or a lost spirit. Long indeed before it enters on the unchangeable state, it may be either a blessing or a curse to its parents, may itself rejoice in existence, as a great good, or else in bitterness exclaim, "Let the day perish wherein I was born."

Think me not unkind in suggesting the latter as a possibility. It is that such sorrow may never be yours or your child's, that I warn you of the danger. I am the more moved to this because I am told, that your first born is a son, and from much and painful observation I know too well the greater dangers to which sons are exposed in this evil world. Amongst the Jewish mothers it is true, the custom was to announce it with joy when a man-child was born into the world, even as now the birth of some royal heir is announced, for each one hoped that perchance she might be the mother of the promised Messiah. How many were dis-

appointed, since one only could be the favoured mother; and many a Christian mother has been disappointed in the hope, that the child whom she has borne and nursed would be a son of God, though not of course that son for whom the Jewish mother looked. Alas! how many have exclaimed with joy, as did the mother of our race at the birth of her first-born, "I have gotten a man from the Lord," who like that mother have lived only to behold him a wretched outcast. God forbid that this worst of evils should be your unhappy lot. Rather may the very opposite to it be your portion. Who knows but that in answer to faithful prayer, and by God's blessing on diligent endeavor, godly discipline, and pious instruction, your child may one day be not only a follower but a minister of Christ, a man of God, a preacher of the glorious gospel. Who knows but the blessing may be perpetuated, and that a long line of faithful and successful ministers of Christ, may descend through him to the end of the world, who shall have thousands and hundreds of thousands to present to the great Shepherd and Bishop of souls as their joy and crown of rejoicing. Cherish such high and holy thoughts, my dear friend, and let them animate you to zeal and perseverance in the use of all the means which

God has appointed to parents for training up their children in his service, and for his glory. In order to effect the object aimed at, I would endeavor to impress most deeply on your mind the conviction of the great agency which God has assigned to parents in this work. As to their bodies, it is well known that of all animals born into this world, there is none so weak and helpless at the first as little children, none which need so much and such long nursing care. Without it they would perish at the birth or soon after. Not less dependent are they on others for the culture of their immortal souls, which, though they cannot die, in the lesser sense of that word, may in its greater—may die that death which never dies. Left to themselves, what do children know of God and Heaven? The same parents who minister to their frail bodies, are also appointed to minister to their never-dying souls. So hath God appointed, and it is meet it should be so. Seeing they receive their evil natures by birth, and inheritance from us, it is wise and good in God to make us in some measure the instruments of averting the dreadful effects thereof. Beside the promptings of natural affection urging us to desire and seek all good for our children, how strongly must we be moved thereto when seeing in them,

almost from their birth, the exhibitions of those very sinful propensities which we feel in ourselves, and they received from us, and soon see in us, copying the same. What must have been the bitterness and remorse of our first parents, at beholding in the fearful crime of their first born, one of the fruits of their own sin against God ; and what a motive must it have furnished for earnest prayer and faithful endeavour in behalf of the rest, that they might be as righteous Abel, and blessed Enoch, not as wretched Cain. It is most carefully to be observed, however, that parents are not the instruments of good to their children, in the same way that they are of evil. Holiness is not transmitted at birth as sin is. We must be born again of God, in order to avoid the evils of our first birth. God has appointed means for this new birth of the soul, which means are chiefly in the hands of parents during the tender years of their children.

It ought to be a source of unspeakable joy to you to know, not only that in heaven there has been devised a merciful plan for the deliverance of your child from the evils of the fall, and that the same has been executed on earth in the death of Christ, but that you enjoy such peculiar advantages for making this great redemption available to your child. What a blessing must you regard it that

your child is born in a christian land, and in one sense in the bosom of the christian Church, and not in a heathen country, and amidst the abominable idolatries thereof. How happy were Jewish parents at the thought of their children being the children of the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, the children of promise, that they were born in the promised land, where was the temple and the sabbaths and the oracles, the covenants and ordinances of the living God. But above all, what a subject of glorying it was to them, that the Messiah was to be born in their land, and of their nation, and the Holy Ghost to come down at his appearing in all His fulness upon their posterity. Nay more, it was a privilege to be born in or near that holy land, though not of Jewish parents, for they could thus hear much of the true God. The children of strangers might be entered into covenant with Jehovah, and often were, being taken by some good Samaritan and presented to the Lord, and then trained for his service. It was good to be about the city and temple of God, though only proselytes of the gate, and worshippers in the court of the Gentiles, the outer apartment of the house of God. Happy the people that were even in such a case as this. But now, if there was such advantage to the Jew, if it might be said of his privileges

by comparison with those of the Gentiles, "Much every way, chiefly because unto them were committed the oracles of God," though those oracles were yet imperfect, what should be your rejoicing that your child is born in a Christian land ; a land of bibles, of sabbaths, and temples, and preachers, and ordinances of Heaven's appointment, and of every assistance you can need in training him for glory. Especially thankful ought you to be that he is born of believing parents, and not of scoffing and infidel ones, as some children are, even in this land. St. Paul assures us, that if only one of the parents believe, the child is holy—that is, a child of the promise, privileged to be received among God's children, so far as to be entered into his visible church, and sealed with his seal, and brought up amongst his people ; but it is your happiness to have in the father of your child, one who sympathizes with you in all your feelings and views, and will co-operate with you according to his ability and opportunity. How different your lot and that of your child in this respect, from the lot of too many mothers and sons. If the child, who has one believing parent is holy, so as to be entered into the school of Christ, what blessing may not be expected by those who strive together with one heart, in prayers and efforts for their children's

salvation. If for a moment you doubt God's tender love to your child, and its interest in the blessings of the Gospel, remember not only that the blessing to Abraham and his posterity was renewed on the day of Pentecost, when it was said, "The promise is to you and your children," but our Lord had before, in the most touching manner, declared his love to little children, by rebuking the unbelief of some, by taking them in his arms, blessing them, and saying, that "of such is the kingdom of Heaven." What an encouragement to all Christian parents to bring them to him for a blessing. He is not now present with us in body as once he was, but he is with us in spirit; we can take our children to him in our prayers, and he will receive them into the arms of his love, and will bless them as he did those on earth. How, and when, that blessing is bestowed so as to be used, we may be unable to see and know; neither did those parents know, whose children were received by him while on earth; but that there was a blessing, however these very children may have frustrated its effect, who can doubt.

It is not for us to know, since we cannot look into the hearts of children, and God hath not told us, how soon the blessed Spirit may begin a gracious operation therein; but it is ours to pray that

God would bless them with all the spiritual blessings of which they are capable, without undertaking to dictate the time or manner of its operation. We should be like parents, who as to the good things of this life, are seeking to lay up in store for their children long before the time when they can use them. The times and seasons are in God's hands, and we have need of patience for ourselves and children, after we have done the will of God, to inherit the blessing. Many prayers have doubtless been offered up by pious parents, and registered in Heaven, which have been answered in rich mercies on their children, long after the time of their ascent. Though I doubt not, my dear friend, that you have before and since its birth, been wrestling with God for a blessing on your child, let me entreat you to wait still upon him, praying as if each prayer might be your last; praying that the Holy Spirit may even now begin its work, if such be God's method, and that it may hereafter be vouchsafed in such measure as shall be needed. Plead all the promises of God in his behalf, especially that the atoning blood of Christ may be applied to his soul. Say unto God that here is a creature whom he hath made, and beseech him to be merciful to the work of his own hands. Make an entire

surrender of him to God, and resolve to regard him and train him henceforth as the property of God. In view of the evil world into which you have brought him, and trembling for his fate, say unto God, who is sufficient for this work, and pray for divine assistance with all earnestness. The God who hath given you this sacred deposit,—this rich talent,—will not withhold the needed aid for its improvement. If there be one prayer which we offer for others, one effort we make for others, more likely to secure the divine favour than any other, surely it must be the prayer of a pious parent for the rescue of a child from eternal misery. As to God's special care of a child thus dedicated to him, let me use the language of another, and say "However unconscious of God's regards, we know that in Christ, he regards the infant with the deepest solicitude. The intense interest and sacred delight with which the loving mother watches her first-born, catches the first gleam of its opening intelligence and moral sensibility, and seeks to nurse the young spirit up for sweet and blessed intercourse with herself,—these are but faint and feeble things compared with that still more intense interest, that still more sacred delight with which a God of love watches the infancy of every human being, sees its

nature unfold, and seeks to draw its young affections to himself.”*

And now, my friend, trusting that you are in the state of mind most suitable for prayer, I offer you the following as a guide and help, though it may be that an overflowing heart shall suggest to you more and better words.

Yours, truly, in the Lord.

PRAYER.

OH, my God, thou hast saved my life from destruction in the hour of danger and of need. Thou hast enabled me to give life to this immortal being; thou hast kept it from perishing at its birth; to whom shall I go with thanksgiving for this deliverance, and with vows and offerings, but to thee. Oh for grace to dedicate myself and child to thee and thy service, henceforth and for ever more. Lord we are thine, the work of thine hands; thou madest us, not we ourselves. Thine we are by the redeeming blood of Christ also, and oh, may we be thine by the sanctifying influences of the Holy

* Dr. Stone.

Ghost. Oh God, what a fearful talent hast thou intrusted to my care in this precious infant. How I tremble to receive it. Is it to be my joy or my grief, an honour or a shame to its parents, its existence a curse or a blessing to itself? When I remember that it is my own child, conceived in sin, such as I ever feel in my own sinful nature, and now born into a wicked world, I am seized with dread for its future condition. To thee I look for relief and help. Oh God, nothing is impossible to thee. Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings thou canst ordain praise. Thou canst write the name of my child in Heaven. Blessed Jesus, thou who didst take little children into thine arms and bless them, bless mine, even mine, now and for ever, washing his soul from sin in thy atoning blood. I ask not for any thing here below. I seek for it the kingdom of heaven and its righteousness, and believe that all other things which are needful will be added. The blessing I intreat, Oh God! is the salvation of his immortal soul. Grant me this, Oh God! and I am content. Never, while I live, may I otherwise feel than I now do. Oh God! if my child is to live only to disappoint the hopes which I now cherish, then in mercy take him from the evil to come, now while I am per-

mitted to hope that thou wilt receive him to thyself, among those little ones, of which is the kingdom of Heaven. I ask all for myself and child, in the name of Jesus Christ, through whom alone there is hope. AMEN!



LETTER II.

MY DEAR FRIEND:

In my first letter I addressed you when lying in that chamber where your child was born, where God had vouchsafed you a gracious deliverance. You were there on your bed, carrying on a solemn transaction with Heaven in behalf of your child, with your heart entering him into covenant with God, pleading the promises to the children of believers, invoking the blood of Jesus, and the influence of the Spirit. Thus did you address that God who is a Spirit, and must be worshipped in spirit and in truth, who bids us pray to him in secret, and promises to reward us openly. But is this all that duty requires? God is not only the God of all the families of earth, blessing each house of the righteous, accepting the prayer that is offered up "secretly among the faithful," but he is the God of that great

family the Church, which was purchased by the blood of his Son, and he calls on us to worship him "in the great congregation." He requires that we not merely believe on him with our hearts, but confess him with our mouths. And is it not his will that parents with their little ones should appear before him? Is there no thanksgiving due to God before the congregation for this child, no public dedication of him required, no prayer of the faithful needed in his behalf, and in yours also, that you may perform your part well?

God, we trust, has already received this child by the word of promise, and in answer to your earnest prayer. In his blessed revelation he has given you assurances of his tender love to little ones, and you have in private pleaded those, and put your child into the arms of his love. So doubtless did those Jewish mothers, who nevertheless afterwards carried their children to Christ when upon earth, and begged him to take them into his very human arms and bless them again. And is there no way of doing this now, or making some near approach to it? May we not take them into his temple, and to his minister and people, who are a part of his mystical body, and beg them to receive him into their arms, and present him to Christ by faithful prayer? And how proper is it that on such an occasion,

parents should publicly renew the dedication made in private, and declare their determination before the Church to bring up the child for God, and call on all present, not only to hear their vows, but to unite in the holy act and ceremony. Nor only this, but as the contracts or covenants between man and man, besides being uttered or written down in words which bind to the performance usually have hand-writing and seal put to them for greater assurance, so also does God not merely give us an instrument of writing, his blessed word, in which he solemnly and repeatedly swears, saying verily, verily, but also adds a seal to the same, that is, some expressive token by which to give us greater assurance. That seal is put on our bodies, and by submitting to it we give this outward assent to the same, as by believing the words of the instrument we have previously assented with our hearts to it. Let us see what this seal is. Need I remind you of God's command to his servant Abraham, that a sign or seal should be put upon himself and household—that of circumcision. This was many years after God had entered into covenant with him by many promises and favors, and he had entered into covenant with God by faith and obedience, and been accepted, being called the friend of God. Nevertheless it pleased God to add another assurance

of his protection and love, in a special mark by which Abraham and his posterity might be known of all men as God's covenant people, and by the perpetual observance of which, they might show their allegiance to him, and secure his favour. I need not say how often this was enjoined, what punishments threatened to its neglect, and what blessings promised to its right use and improvement.

It never was intermitted by any considerable numbers, except during the passage through the wilderness, when it was most difficult of performance, and not so necessary as a distinguishing mark of God's people, who were then literally pilgrims and sojourners, and distinguished in so many other ways. Nor does the neglect seem to have provoked God's displeasure, but only to have produced a special command for the renewal of the rite so soon as they entered the promised land. So important was it deemed in the regulations of God's Church, that our Lord himself submitted to it, in order to fulfil all righteousness, as he afterwards did to baptism, when he was publicly acknowledged to be the Son of God. The pious Jew hastened, according to the command, to have his child sealed as the child of God, and to make this public confession for him. It was considered by some to be the very first act performed for the child according to an

opinion held, that it was not a perfect child until the eighth day. At the very birth of the child then the Jewish parent made him to become a debtor in this public way, to do the whole law, and God made himself a debtor to fulfil all his blessed promises to the children of his people. And if Abraham not only believed with his heart, but thus openly confessed Jehovah, and was required to do the same for his household, shall we for a moment suppose, when baptism was substituted for the Jewish rite, and was enjoined on parents, that their children were excluded, and when our Lord so emphatically said, "Suffer little children to come unto me, for of such is the Kingdom of God." It is then your privilege and duty to do something more than the private dedication of your child, and to have some other assurance of God's love to it, than even the blessed words on record. You may take it unto the house of God, and ask the people of God to bear it on their hearts to the throne of grace, and the minister of God to put God's own sign and seal upon it. Pious Christians have ever delighted and hasted to do this. Some mothers have not even waited for strength to bear the little infant, light as the burthen is, in their own arms to the house of God, but have sent it by other, while they have continued to wrestle with God at home for the

blessing. They have not been satisfied merely to have their children born within the bounds of the visible Church, though that is a great privilege, and that they have believing parents who will train them up for Heaven, which is a still greater blessing, but according to God's will and gracious permission, they wish them to be formally received by and into the congregation of Christ's flock, thus grafting them into Christ's body—that is his Church—that they may grow up into Christ himself. If such be God's will, then as an act of obedience it must be right, and a blessing belongs to it. What though the benefit of Christ's death, who died for all, may have been the child's before, by promise; what though in answer to the prayer of faith, through the intercession of Christ, God may have blessed it before and granted the Holy Spirit for its use, as soon as it is capable of it; has God but one blessing to bestow, but one grant of the Spirit to make, but one assurance of pardon to give? Is this our God who supplies us day by day with food, renews his earthly blessings each hour, each moment, and has told us, that he is more willing to give us his Holy Spirit, whose office is to renew day by day, than earthly parents to give good things to their children.

Our Lord himself, though he had the Spirit poured out upon him long before, yet received it again

and most manifestly at his baptism. There may be a special blessing and measure of the Spirit assigned to this act, if rightly done, though not tied to the very moment of baptism. If fervent prayers be now offered up, who shall say they may not be the effectual prayers of the righteous, which avail to secure a blessing for the child, though at some future day, just as many a labour of man produces its fruit at some distant period.

“Can the child of so many tears perish,” was the answer of a venerable bishop to a mother whose child had been baptized, and educated for Christ, but who was then an infidel, and the mother’s heart ready to break. But that infidel became a faithful minister of Christ, none other than the great Augustine. It is thus that God may make this ordinance work together with attendant means for the spiritual good of one who for a long time has utterly neglected and dishonored it. If it be said that we make too much of a mere ceremony, only once observed, and administered to an unconscious infant, that there is no analogous case, nothing sustaining the claim put in for it in the word and dispensations of God ; we answer, that it is not a mere ceremony, that the use of water is only one part, and the far inferior part. *Holy baptism* is administered with faithful prayer, and the word, in the name

of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. All the waters of the ocean were useless without these. And though the outward form of water be used but once, the prayer and word are often to be renewed by the parent, and the child; thus improving the baptism, as the laying on of hands upon the confirmed, and the ordained is done but once, while the vows and prayers are often to be renewed, and the obligations always fulfilling. If it be asked, where is the difference as to religious advantages and God's favor between children thus baptized, and others unbaptized who live in the same society, have the same scriptures for their instruction, and the same sabbaths, temples, and ministers; we answer, that though God may, and, doubtless, does dispense his Spirit when this ordinance is neglected, either through ignorance or the prejudice of education, yet there may be much difference in many cases between the two. This neglect of their baptismal dedication, may only be the first of a series of neglects, each one leading to the next, whose combined effect may contribute much to the perdition of the child; while the right performance of it may be the first of a series of pious acts, each facilitating and ensuring the next, which may contribute much to the salvation of the child. We have little doubt of the truth of what is affirmed by those

who have made particular observation and inquiry, that it will be found as a general rule, that far more in proportion to the number, in any particular region, of those who have been baptized in infancy, have become pious in after life, than of those whose baptism has been neglected. It is most reasonable that it should be so. Has God established a Church on earth, and gathered his children into a fellowship, and placed them in a school, with laws and ordinances and officers, and has he appointed a public form of admission into it; and shall we still say, that from association with God's people, and the use of their books, and temples, and sabbaths, we can derive all the substantial benefit to ourselves, without being introduced regularly and fully into their body by a particular mode, even though that mode be of God's appointment? Is not this tempting God? Is not this too like the conduct of certain infidels and moralists, who boast of their just notions of God and of morals, and compare their outward conduct with that of many Christians, without ascribing as they ought, what is correct in their system and practice, to the influence of that very religion which they reject, and the lives of those very persons whom they regard as mistaken in their faith. Infidels and moralists should be carried beyond the bounds of Christianity, in order to test

their system, and see what would be the lives of its advocates ; and so those who make light of connection with God's Church, in the way of his ordaining, should just suppose that Church to be dissolved, its ordinances, its ministers, its discipline, all dispensed with, and each one left, even with the Bible in his hand, to work out his own salvation as seems best to himself.

Now my dear friend, individuals who would in their own case, or in the case of their children, dispense with any of the advantages of God's Church, are just so far endeavoring to set aside the Church of God in its visible organization, and for thus mutilating it in its outward form, who can say how far God in displeasure, may withhold a measure of his inward grace. Such a risk the affectionate mother whom I address, will not run in regard to the child whom God has placed under her care, and for whose benefit he has established a well ordered school upon earth. And now let me invite you again to pray that God would grant the promised Spirit to your child, for though every gift and operation of the Spirit does not amount to the new birth unto righteousness, yet there may be, long ere we can certainly know it, the beginnings of grace, a disposition to holiness, the effect of God's invisible Spirit on the hearts of our children, and

which may incline them to the reception of that word, of which at an early age they shall be born again, and by which they shall grow up to the stature of the fulness of a perfect man in Christ Jesus.

PRAYER.

O my God, I have already blessed thee for the sweet assurances of thy word that children are dear to thee, that of such is thy kingdom. But for these blessed words of our dear Saviour, how could we know what would become of them when they are taken away in their infancy. I bless thee also that thou hast confirmed our hope, by establishing thy kingdom upon earth and receiving them into it, as the outer court of Heaven, where, as they grow in age, they may be prepared for the inner sanctuary, even Heaven itself. I rejoice in this privilege, and hasten to bear my child into the midst of the assembly of the saints upon earth, that thou mayest there publicly receive it by the hands and hearts of thy minister and people. I bless thee that thou hast appointed the holy ordinance of baptism, with which to seal all the promises of thy word to

our children, and by which to unite us to thy people upon earth in an outward and visible fellowship, and to be a means of uniting us to thyself through prayer and faith. O God, I would renew the dedication of my child to thee, and openly confess Christ in his name, seeking first the kingdom of Heaven, and trusting that all else which is needful shall be added unto him. O God, I would hasten to have the mark of thy children put on my child, and not incur thy displeasure, as Moses did, by any unnecessary delay. I will perform this duty as an act of obedience to thee, and not with any superstitious reverence for an outward ceremony, expecting salvation from it. I pray thee to baptize the soul of my child, with thy Holy Spirit, at whatsoever time and by whatsoever means thou shalt choose, and to give me grace to perform all my engagements in his behalf, regarding his baptism as only one of the many means thou hast commanded me to use for the salvation of his immortal soul. I ask all in the name of Him through whom alone I hope for any blessing on myself and child. Amen.

LETTER III.

MY DEAR FRIEND:

You are now resolved, at an early period, to present your child to the Lord in his holy temple. The minister and congregation are always ready to receive him into their fellowship, and unite with you in offering him up to the Lord. But this solemn act must be performed with appropriate words and vows. Though it might suffice for its validity merely to repeat the words Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, over the child, and baptize it with water in these blessed names, yet more than this is necessary to make the ceremony as edifying as may be. God hath reposed such trust in his Church as to believe that without his appointment of a full service, she would do it well, making the baptism a good confession, and requiring the answer of a good conscience from those coming to it, or bringing children to it. So far from making it the mere ceremony of a moment, she will not permit even infants to be baptized, without setting forth before all present, the whole substance of our religion in a service which should often be reviewed in after life.

As the early converts to Christianity, were not baptized without first renouncing all that was false

in their previous belief, and declaring their faith in Christ and promising obedience ; so from the first, infants have been required to promise the same through others, who are bound to see that they be instructed in the Christian system, and brought up to renounce all that is contrary to it in faith and practice.

The Church seeks to adopt the best method, and get the best security she can to prevent the children from dishonoring her and their great Head. The substance of her service, and much of its form, has come down to us from early times. It becomes you to examine it carefully, and pray over it fervently, that so you may use it understandingly and heartily. On your right understanding of its design, and earnest desire that your child may be all that is asked and promised for him, and on your earnest prayer to God for his grace, much may depend. To go through such a form without understanding and feeling it, must be offensive to God. You ought, therefore, first to go through the vows, as if you were making them for yourself, or renewing them again for your own benefit, and thus try whether you will make them aright for your child. If you have not the faith, the penitence, the desires, the determination, which you are about to profess for your child, how can you sincerely speak for

him ; how can you really desire and determine to seek these things for him, and thus be one of the persons whom the Church calls for, and to whom she entrusts the religious education of her young members ? If you cannot, then in consistency you must seek some others to make these answers, and some who can do it with their whole heart, and on whom must devolve the whole transaction. But supposing that you have all proper feeling and desires, it becomes you to observe one striking feature in the service to be used. You will perceive that now, as at first, and at all times, the Church requires those presenting children, to speak positively in their name, and, as with their voice, promising faith, penitence, and obedience, and asking baptism on the strength of this promise.

Whatever other reasons there be for such a strong figure of speech, such a supposition unsustained by fact, since the children cannot speak or will, surely she must have designed thus to impress on sponsors, the immense influence which they may possess over the young, and which may justify such assurances as to their future belief and conduct.

Some have proposed to change the form, and simply require a promise from the sponsors to use their utmost endeavors to make these children what

they should be. This duty the Church has set forth in the latter part of the service, in addition to solemn promises in the child's name. Whatever be the form of doing it, the Church has a right to require a strong promise from sponsors. If God has given them power for good over the hearts and minds of children, he has a right to require its exercise and will certainly do it, and the Church has a right to make the promise of it a part of her baptismal service.

The vow thus understood as binding the sponsor to the full exertion of his influence, and as being made by the child in his own name, though with the voice of another, has the double effect of moving the sponsors to the more faithful performance of their parts and duties, and of connecting the baptism with the mind of the child at a future period, thus, as it were, extending the holy ceremony, and giving time for the union of the sign and thing signified, and making it a baptism not of water only, but also of the Spirit.

But so anxious is the Church to avail herself of every assistance which can be obtained, in this important duty of religious education, that she is not willing to rely on either the natural or spiritual affection of parents to do all that is required, in order to the well-being of her young members, but in

every age, whether Jewish or Christian, has called in the aid of others, whom she names God-Fathers and God-Mothers. I need not say that these should have the hearts of Christian Fathers and Mothers, and who can be trusted with such a duty. Perhaps you may, as is the case with some others, have doubts as to the expediency of this, from seeing how seldom it is rightly used, and may not have taken pains to look out for some suitable persons to unite with you on the occasion which is at hand. Let me therefore present the following view of it for your consideration. By the constitution of society, as God himself hath appointed, we are all members one of another, so that we must exert some influence either for good or ill, over each other. It is desirable to adopt the most effectual measures for increasing good influences, and diminishing evil ones. One of the many difficulties which parents meet with in the right education of their children, is the misconduct of other parents in the management of their children, either spoiling them by indulgence, or by evil example and false principles leading them astray. Children mingling together will be corrupted by evil communication. It sometimes happens that the nearest relations and most intimate friends are thus, however undesignedly, the greatest hinderers of those parents

who are desirous to do their duty. It has been often wished that societies were formed among parents of similar views, in order to encourage and strengthen each other in the right government of the young, instead of permitting the more weak and negligent to set the example as to manners and habits. Doubtless, much good might be effected by such associations. But ought not the whole Church to be actually such a society, and each congregation an auxiliary thereto? Does not each congregation receive into its society every child that is baptized, being regarded as a mother to the same? Is not each member forbidden to offend one of these little ones, that is, tempt them to sin, at the peril of God's heavy displeasure? When the minister calls on all the congregation to pray for the child, is not this very principle of sponsorship recognized, and each member considered as a parent praying for his own child, and bound to watch over it for good?

What parent but must delight at the thought of having so many friends praying for and watching over their children? But the Church has ever thought good to choose some special ones, to co-operate with parents at all times, more particularly in this act of presenting them to God, and making a covenant for them. These, for the most part, are relations

and neighbours, who by their example and influence, have power to do them much good, but who may by neglect, or from the fear of finding fault, do them evil. It may be, that neglected as the vows of sponsors too often are, more good has been done by them, and more evil prevented, than some are apt to suppose. Some, who otherwise would refrain from warning words, or from the effort to do good to the young ones around them, lest they should offend either parents or children, are encouraged to proceed by remembering the vows once uttered ; and what parent or what child will dispute that right, and who can tell what good a word in season, or one earnest prayer may do. And even in the case of some most negligent sponsor, or some very weak one who is tempted by false indulgence or evil example to lead a young one into those very lusts and vanities which he had renounced for him, may not the thought of those solemn vows, and the place and the occasion, come over his conscience, with a power which shall cause him to refrain from the evil he would otherwise do. Is not this one way in which the Church teaches that most important truth, that we are all responsible one for another, and especially for the young—that not merely parents, but others have an account to render for them—that as the good

Samaritan was a better neighbour to the wounded man, though not of his country, than the priest or the Levite, so some sponsors may be better than the natural parents, be truly god-fathers and god-mothers to the children of their adoption. The vows that are required often contribute to this. Nay more, it is important that even fathers and mothers have vows put into their mouths, for some of them by weakness and neglect, are the worst enemies of their children, and the Church does well to exact strict promises from them.

I will only add, that the Bible is full of this principle, and that so the ancient Jews understood it, for there was a proverb among them, "That if the neighbour of a godly man sinneth, the godly man himself hath also sinned;" so great did they esteem the influence of example and holy intercourse. Choose, therefore, my friend, some faithful ones as sponsors for your child. Let not courtesy or fear of offending direct your choice. Select such as you would wish to be guardians and friends of your child, were you to be removed by death; and sure I am, in that event you will not object to this well-meant effort of the Church for her children's welfare.

With the renewal of my request, that you will prayerfully consider those vows by which, and in

the name of your child, and with your own hearty approval, you renounce all that is evil, and choose all that is good, I again invite you to prayer.

PRAYER.

O my God, I have now resolved at the earliest opportunity to present my child in thy holy temple, and ask thy blessing. I wish publicly to confess the Saviour of mankind in his name, in the hope that he will one day bless me for it, and own the deed. I desire to join him to thy people in a covenant with thee, and to have their prayers in his behalf. I wish to see him baptized in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. I do not superstitiously expect salvation for him from the waters of baptism, but thou canst make the whole sacred transaction a means of grace to him, in thine own time and way. Thou didst openly send thy Spirit upon thy Son Jesus Christ, in the river of Jordan, and it may be thou wilt send thy Spirit, however invisible, even now, to own and bless my child. I am about to take part in the solemn service appointed by the Church, for the baptism of my child. O may I use the words

with a wise and understanding heart. I am about to make those vows which have come down to us from the earliest ages of the Church. May I use them with a sincere desire that they be fulfilled. O God, I do now beforehand in the name of my child, most heartily renounce the devil and all his works, praying thee to save him from that "roaring lion who goeth about seeking whom he may devour." I do here renounce this wicked world, into which my child is born, with all its pomps and vanities, and all the sinful lusts of the flesh, praying that he may neither follow nor be led by them. I do most sincerely believe the articles of the Christian faith, and trust that my child will do the same. But O God, how weak and insufficient I am for this work. Send me help from the sanctuary. Direct me in the choice of faithful sponsors, who will love my child, and whose prayers, instruction, and example, shall be blest to him. I ask all in the name of Jesus Christ. AMEN.

LETTER IV.

MY DEAR FRIEND :

The baptism of your child is now over. In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost, pure water was poured over his sweet face, and the sign of the cross made on his brow, in token that hereafter he should not be ashamed to confess that Saviour, now confessed for him. Solemn prayers were also used, and thus he was received into the congregation of Christ's Church, and declared to be grafted into Christ's body—the Church. So far as the outward part, the washing of regeneration, or baptism with water goes, all has certainly been rightly done. As to the fervency of the prayers offered up, the faith of those taking part in the transaction, the baptism of the soul by the Spirit, God only knows. Still should your child die, or should it have died at any time from his birth until the age of knowing good from evil, I doubt not that a merciful God, for the sake of him who tasted death for us all, would receive him to his arms. But think not that all is done and your child safe, though sealed with God's own sign, and thus renewedly assured of his love. If he live how much is to be done for him and by him in order to salva-

tion. What you and others have done, is only to be regarded as a pledge and beginning of what is to be done, just as the first nursing care of a parent and other friends, is only the beginning of much more which is needed, else the child must perish. It is your duty to renew the dedication of your child each day, and to entreat for him the Holy Spirit, which alone can enable him, to fulfil the vows made in his name. So soon as his infant lips are able to utter the dear name of Father, he should be taught to call upon that Father who is in Heaven. Let the good form of prayer, given by our blessed Lord, as well as others, be constantly used by him, as we know not how soon God may pour the spirit of prayer into his heart, enabling him to say, Abba Father, and to give good proof that he is born of the word and spirit, as well as of water. In order to do your part in bringing him to this filial feeling, you must now look on him, not as an innocent little being, so born because a child of promise, or so made in the waters of baptism, because thus a child of the Church, but still as a poor sinful creature, whose first exhibitions of character will give sad proofs of corruption. You must remember that the very condition on which you were permitted to enter him formally into Christ's Church, by having the seal of baptism in the name of the triune God

put upon him, was that so soon as he should reach the age of discretion, he should come as a poor penitent sinner to Christ for salvation. It is your's to make use of God's holy law as a schoolmaster, to bring him thus to Christ. It is your duty to be ever watching the developments of sin in his tempers and actions, and to be showing him how contrary these are to God's holiness, and how offensive in his sight, needing the death and intercession of the Saviour, and the sanctifying influences of the Spirit, and thus bringing him to that faith and repentance, without which, baptism with water, and all its other accompaniments, will be of no avail. If, according to St. Paul, circumcision profiteth, if the law be kept, otherwise the circumcision becomes uncircumcision, so baptism is the mere washing away of the filth of the flesh, and is not holy baptism, such as God approves, unless there be the answer of a good conscience—that is the requisite qualification of faith and repentance. It seems, then, that according to Scripture and the Church, the efficacy or profit of these ordinances in the case of infants, is made to depend on something future, whatever God may do in the way of preparation.

The benefit of circumcision and baptism, seems to have been suspended until the time of knowing good from evil, and then if the terms be complied

with, and the conditions fulfilled, the blessing is realized ; otherwise, though the outward circumcision and baptism has been observed, they are as though they were not. But again I say how much depends upon yourself whether the baptism be a mere washing of the body, and not the answer of a good conscience, the new birth unto righteousness, the new creature in Christ, the conversion or turning of the soul to God. It is your's during the tender years of your child, to teach him that truth which he cannot know of himself, and by which God sanctifies the soul—to sow the seed of God's word in his heart, by which we are born again. It is your's to train him in the way that he should go, remembering the promise, that when he is old he will not depart from it. It is your's to bring him up in the nurture as well as admonition of the Lord, remembering that nurture means godly discipline.

If the Church requires you to say positively and unhesitatingly, that your child shall believe certain things, and renounce certain things, and do certain things, it must be that you have great power to influence him to fulfil these promises, and until he comes to the fearful age of responsibility, you yourself are held responsible for the full amount of whatever power you may exert over him.

You become guilty of his want of faith, and self-

denial, and obedience, so far as he is capable of them, and you could help him to the attainment. He will believe almost any thing you choose to teach him, especially if it be the truth of God. He will do, and forbear to do, what you shall take due pains to effect. During his tender years he is incapable of self-control, but you can control him. He cannot watch against temptation, but you can guard him against it. It is not expected that he should correct his own faults, but you can and ought to do it for him. He cannot pray for God's Holy Spirit in faith, but you can do it for him. He cannot avoid or resist that evil one, who as a roaring lion goes about, seeking whom he may devour, but you can do much in this way. He cannot avoid evil communication, but you can preserve him in a great measure from its corrupting influence. How much is there that parents can do for their children, which the children cannot do for themselves, and is it not cruel to neglect it? Does not he who spoileth his child hate him? The civil laws hold parents accountable for many things done by their children, until an age far beyond that which the Church contemplates as the age of discretion, and does not God hold them reponsible also, and guilty of their children's ignorance and vice; and is not the Church justified in the charge she lays upon them, and the

account she requires of them, and will not these very children upbraid them with the cruelty of not doing for them what they could not do for themselves, at that weak and tender age, when habits are formed, which often baffle all the strength of manhood to overcome.

But now let me tell you, my dear friend, that you cannot do your duty so as to secure God's blessing and your child's welfare, without time, and trouble, and resolution, and perseverance, and above all, the mighty help of God. You must make sacrifices of ease, of pleasure, of fashion, of popularity; must differ much from most around you in the training of your children, and must say, "Whatever others may do, as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord," as you hope for success.

Permit me to conclude this letter by saying, that he who thus writes, has from his age, his office, and other circumstances, had a more than ordinary opportunity of observing the effects of different modes of training up the young. He can now speak from an attentive observation on four generations, including the one with which he entered life, and that which is fast rising into manhood. He feels, therefore, that he may, and is in duty bound, for the benefit of others, to give a decided testimony on

this subject. That testimony is unhesitatingly given in favour of the effects of a religious education faithfully, conscientiously, and perseveringly pursued. He has seen many failures even where there was some degree of sincere desire and endeavour to have their children to be God's children. This results from the constitution of man, and the free agency which belongs to him. Sometimes, indeed, they happen where great care and fidelity have been observed. If it were not for this, if religious education invariably resulted in the piety of the subjects thereof, we might be tempted to ascribe it all to the never-failing agency of man, and thus rob God of his glory, and not seek his grace as indispensable.

But if asked where I have seen the most frequent and most marked success, I would at once, and with an unerring hand, point to families where almost, if not all the children were the blest : and not only these, but where children's children seemed as it were to inherit the blessing. From such families, not only faithful members of the Church, but devoted ministers of religion have come forth in numbers to perpetuate the work. An interesting volume might be written tracing the connexion between their religious training and subsequent lives. But if I am asked as to the character of

these persons, and the manner of their dealing with the young, I must say, they were not the half-hearted, the wavering, the inconsistent, who together with some religious discipline mingle much of weak indulgence, with some religious instruction and desires for their children's salvation, mingle much of this world's unhallowed tuition, and too much desire for this world's honours and riches; but they were the true hearted ones who really sought for their children the kingdom of Heaven and its righteousness first, trusting to God to add whatever else might be necessary,—they were pains-taking, praying, watching parents, who believed that if they did their duty faithfully, no matter how unpleasant at the time to their poor sinful children, and how contrary to the practice of their neighbours, God would bless them. They were persons who entered into the full meaning of the baptismal vows, and felt that they also virtually bound themselves to do all that in them lay to induce their children to fulfil them to the letter and the spirit. They were persons who strictly followed all the directions given to parents and sponsors, in the baptismal service, and brought their children up in the principles set forth in the catechism, not merely because the Church had thus set them forth,

but chiefly because they believed them to be drawn from the Holy Bible.

I do here testify that such are the parents, who according to my observation, have been blessed, while those who have erred, as did even an Eli and a David, by false indulgence, and as far more have done by trying to bring up their children for the two-fold service of God and mammon, have failed, though God may sometimes have shown the power of his grace by the conversion of their ill-educated children, as he does also at times save the children of the most ungodly, plucking them as brands from the burning. And here let me add, that however it may continue as a proverb, that the sons of ministers are usually the most irreligious, and however true it is that the sons of irreligious ministers are most apt to be so, and that some even pious ministers are very negligent of their children's religious education, and spoil them by indulgence, yet it is a fact that God does abundantly bless the children of faithful ministers, who faithfully train them for Heaven, and that a great army of preachers has ever been on the field, the sons of those who have fallen on that field, or worn out in the service. What would the sanctuary do without the many sons who have succeeded to the fathers' offices?

Follow the example, my dear friend, of those who ever keep before their hearts the one thing needful as that which they desire for their children, and make every thing else yield to this. Then, and only then, can you expect the blessing of Him, who declares that he is a jealous God, and must have the supreme love and entire service of his children. God grant that you and your child may thus serve him.

Yours, truly.

PRAYER.

O my God, my child is now connected with thy Church on earth, not merely by its birth in a Christian land and of believing parents, and because of thy promise to the seed of such, but more fully by an outward ordinance of thine own appointment. Although as thy creature, and as the object of thy redeeming love, it was already bound to serve thee, and although its parents were already under the highest obligations to bring it up for Heaven, yet we bless thee for appointing an ordinance to assure us yet more of thy love and of our duty. May the solemn vows which have been offered, the more

move us to perform our parts and duties, and when our child shall understand all that he has promised by us, may he gladly take these vows upon himself, and claim the full blessing which we have sought for him. O God, how much is yet to be done, and how weak and insufficient am I for its performance. Strengthen me, I pray thee, for my duty. I would daily renew the dedication of my child to thee, and ask thy Holy Spirit to restrain his corrupt propensities, and renew his sinful nature. Let me not be blind to his faults, but rather seek to know them, that I may endeavour to correct them. Save me from all undue anxiety for his earthly condition. May his immortal soul be the object of my chief solicitude. May my resolution ever be to regulate his instruction and government by the rule of thy word, and not by the customs and principles of others. May I consider no labour too great which is bestowed on the accomplishment of this most important of all objects. And, O God, give me the unspeakable happiness of seeing this, my child, at the earliest period when he can know good from evil, and can understand what has been done for him, come forward with an holy boldness, and avow himself the soldier of the blessed Jesus. So may he continue to his life's end, and finally be received together with the faithful into the kingdom

of Heaven above. Grant this, O God, for Christ's sake. AMEN.

LETTER V.

MY DEAR FRIEND:

The importance of the subject will justify a continuance of my remarks on the duty which devolves on you, as to the religious education of your child. I shall now refer you to some of the directions given in the baptismal and confirmation service of the Church, which you will find to be in conformity with the sentiments already expressed.

Immediately after the baptism we are called on to pray that this child may lead the rest of his life according to this beginning—that is, according to the prayers offered up for him—according to the solemn vows made in his name; not that a new nature has been put into him, and that being made an innocent angel, he is only to preserve that nature, and never need repentance, as some would understand it. In order that he may go on according to the beginning made, the sponsors are directed to see that this infant be taught, so soon as he shall be able to learn, what a solemn vow, promise, and profession he

hath here made by them, and they must call upon him to hear sermons, and chiefly that he learn the creed, the Lord's prayer, and the ten commandments, and all other things which a Christian ought to know and believe to his soul's health; and when he has done this, and is sufficiently instructed in the other parts of the Church catechism, that is, what relates to the promises and the sacraments, then is he to be brought to the Bishop to be confirmed by him, that is, when he is able with the use of his own mouth, and the consent of his own will, to renew all that was promised for him in his baptism. In other words, he is to come when he has attained to the faith and repentance which was promised in his baptism, or when he has experienced that "death unto sin and new birth unto righteousness," which in the catechism is declared to be the inward and spiritual grace of baptism, and to which his baptism with water, in the name of the Trinity, if rightly used, contributed as one of the means of receiving it, and as a pledge to assure him thereof, although the grace be not tied to the moment and act of baptism.

In these words, my dear friend, you perceive not merely the means which the Church directs you to use with your children for the purpose of improving the privileges of baptism, but also that she confi-

dently expects an early effect from them, viz., that as soon as it is capable of understanding its own condition and what Christ's religion is. This is the most critical and eventful period in the life of men. Now, it is that they turn to or from God—that they see no beauty in Christ and his religion, or that they become altogether lovely. Previous to this time, if they should die, there is good hope that he who pities as a father does his children, and knows how to have compassion on the ignorant, will receive them to himself, and effect whatever change is necessary to fit them for his love and service in Heaven; but if they pass this age and choose not God for their portion, and Christ for their Saviour, where is our hope for them? Well may parents be uneasy and distressed as to such. God no doubt permits uncertainty to rest on the period of responsibility, in order to make parents more diligent and prayerful in behalf of their children, that they may be prepared for death whenever it comes. As to this critical period, however, let me warn you against a fatal error and weakness of too many parents, who relax their efforts, and relinquish their plan of action, just at the time when the steady arm of discipline, and the voices of holy admonition are most needful. At the very time when the world, the flesh, and the devil, whom they renounced in

the name of their children, are making their most vigorous efforts to secure them, lest they escape from their hands, some parents begin to falter and to change, and after having done much in the way of previous nurture and admonition, now seem through weakness to let go the reins which God had put into their hands, or through fear that their children may not enter the world with advantage, now betray them to the enemy, by seeking the kingdom of this world for them at present, and still hoping that the things which make for their everlasting peace, will at some future day be added.

It is at this critical juncture, when the two worlds are striving for dominion over the youthful heart, that the Church bids sponsors and ministers bend all their efforts towards securing it for Heaven. Her chief officers are sent about to see what success has attended these labours, and to add their efforts in the rite of confirmation, for the permanent establishment of the young in the service of God.

This belief in, and expectation of, early piety in those who had been faithfully trained in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, is not peculiar to the Christian Church. God had long before said, "I know my servant Abraham, that he will command his household after him," and had declared by Solomon, how he "loved those who loved him,

and that those who sought him early should find him." The pious Jews not only taught the laws of God to their children in the diligent manner commanded through Moses, but believed in the efficacy of the word thus taught for the conversion of the souls of their children. At three years of age they were allowed to enter with their parents into the temple, and be present at the services. At the age of six or seven, when they had learned to read the Books of Moses, they were considered as capable of some responsible acts. At the age of thirteen, there was something like the rite of confirmation, in their renewal of the vows of circumcision, after which they partook of the passover.

Our Lord, it is believed, went to the Temple at twelve years of age for this purpose. From the age of thirteen to twenty, the sons of Jewish parents were called young men—not as is too often the case with us, because they had cast off parental authority, and were allowed to be their own rulers, but as St. John says, "because they had overcome the wicked one." In a public profession of the Jewish faith, they had given proof of a renunciation of the devil and all his works, and of their determination to serve the Lord. Thus did they remember their Creator in the days of their youth. And is there any thing in the religion of Christ more difficult to

be understood and realized in the heart and life, than in the Jewish? The Jews only saw through a glass darkly what we see face to face. Easy is our yoke, and light our burden compared with their's. Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings in the Church of Christ, that is, out of the renewed hearts of very young disciples of Christ, can God bring forth praise.

If there be any one thing above all others, my dear friend, which our Church in her services and discipline seeks, it is this early turning to, and choosing the Lord. Therefore does she give the directions I have mentioned in the first part of this letter, viz: That as soon as they shall be able to learn what a solemn vow, promise, and profession *they have made* by you, you must teach them what it is. You must tell them that it was considered their vow, because what God requires of them, that it is their bounden duty to fulfil, and that it must be the loss of their souls to draw back.

You must not do the work of God deceitfully, but tell them honestly all that they have promised and renounced; and give them all the aid in your power by precept and example, to redeem the pledges made. That they may know these things the better, you must call on them to hear sermons, whereby you may perceive what an honour God puts on that ordinance which many despise, and

which some, even among Christians, are disposed to undervalue. Foolishness as it seems to the irreligious, it is nevertheless the great instrument by which God saves those that believe. Parents, therefore, should see and take their children to the house where sermons are preached; and ministers should preach so as that the little ones may easily understand them, and thus be made wise unto salvation. I need not say what kind of sermons were intended by our forefathers who gave that direction. They were not such sermons as had for a long time been preached, when any were preached, not such as magnified the Church and Sacraments, and the saints, and the priesthood, and the ceremonials of religion, and the works of men beyond measure, but such as our Lord and the Apostles preached, such as the noble army of martyrs and confessors, in the very first and best ages of the Church preached, such as the valiant Reformers preached; sermons which magnified Christ and his word; such as humbled the sinner and sent him penitent and believing to the foot of the cross, which put all other things in their right place, and assigned them their due proportion of importance. Faithful specimens of such sermons we have in the Homilies of our Church, which are recommended in the Articles; and which not only have been often read in public, according to their original design, but deserve to be

read in private as containing wholesome doctrine, not only for the times in which they were written, but for the times in which we live also ; and which I hope you will make a part of the course of instruction you shall pursue with your child. And God grant that it may always be the lot of yourself and your child, to sit under some faithful man of God, who preaches the truth as thus set forth.

But think not for a moment that our Church prefers the teaching of man in sermons, to the teaching of God in his own word, for immediately after the injunction to see that the child hear sermons, it is said, “ And *chiefly* ye shall provide that he may learn the creed, the Lord’s prayer, the ten commandments, and all other things which a Christian ought to know and believe to his soul’s health.” You must teach him the summary of the Gospel as in the creed—the summary of the law as in the ten commandments—and the summary of devotion as in the Lord’s prayer. These are all found in the catechism, together with their explanations ; also the brief accounts of the sacraments, with the qualifications for their use, and the benefits of worthily receiving them.

The whole catechism is required to be known, believed, and felt, in order to confirmation. Nor is his so slight an attainment as some suppose, from

the mere sound of these words which declare the requisite qualification for confirmation. If you will read its title, you will find it to be "An instruction to be learned by every person before he be brought to the Bishop to be confirmed." Now although it be well to begin betimes to impress the words on the memories of children, and to explain the meaning of the same to their minds, and seek to impress the same on their hearts, yet it is evident that the whole of it cannot be understood, and realized, and repeated in sincerity and truth, until we have come to the age of discretion, until we have attained that which is sought for and vowed at the time of our baptism. We must feel our sinful state by nature, be conscious of our renewal by God's spirit, have realized that "repentance by which we forsake sin, and that faith which steadfastly believes the promises of God in the sacrament of baptism, viz.: pardon of sin through Christ, and sanctification by the Holy Ghost." Then are we prepared to thank God in the rite of confirmation, for the forgiveness of all our sins, pray to him as children for the increase of all our graces, and proceed immediately to the Lord's Supper, and in it to communion with him and his saints upon earth.

Such is plainly the teaching and the aim of our Church in the service we have been considering.

She is sustained in it by the word of God, and the experience of man. In every age, and under every dispensation, there have been blessed witnesses to its truth in the genuine piety of numbers of very young persons, who, by the grace of God acting through the instrumentality of his Church and all the means of his ordaining, have become wise unto salvation. Seek it therefore my dear friend for your child, in sincerity and earnestness, believing that it is an attainable blessing. Be not afraid, as too many parents are, of an early profession of piety. I would have you be much afraid of a false profession, but not of an early one when sincere. If I may be allowed to bear my testimony on this subject also, I would say, that while I have with fear and trembling, laid my hands on the heads of some very young ones, I have had the happiness to know and to observe, that for the most part they have continued steadfast and consistent, while many of riper years have disappointed all the hopes entertained of them. But then I must emphatically say, that the very young ones alluded to, were the children of true hearted parents, who faithfully trained them for Heaven, and that themselves gave the strongest proofs in their conversation and conduct of having experienced "a death unto sin and a new birth unto righteousness." May such be the bless-

ing which is in store for your dear child. Once more let me offer you a few words in which to seek God's blessing for him.

PRAYER.

O my God, once more I would lift up my heart in prayer for this poor child of sin which lies before me. I now look on his sweet face, as it were the face of an angel; I now anticipate the many joyous moments I shall have in seeing his first smiles, in hearing his first words, in aiding his first steps, and observing the first dawnings of intelligence of his infant mind; but alas! how soon must I also witness the sad proofs of inbred sin, and how I tremble to think of the rapid increase of his corruption, and of the temptation which will surround him. Let me be faithful in discerning and not concealing his faults, in controlling and not indulging him, in praying for him and teaching him to pray, as well as communicating with all care those instructions which I was enjoined to do at the time of his baptism. Let me never weary in this duty, but devote a sufficient portion of each day to its performance, rather neglecting other things, and suffering loss of earthly things, than

omitting this. May I in faith and with earnest prayer, and great anxiety, seek the renewal of his soul at the earliest possible period. Save me from all uneasy thoughts about his condition here below, and may I never for a moment yield to the evil principles and practices of the age we live in, and the customs of those around me. And O God, at that fearful period, when my child has come to know good and ill, and is to choose between them, be thou especially and effectually present by thy Holy Spirit to incline his heart to good. Convinced of sin by the Holy Ghost, brought to Christ by the law as a schoolmaster teaching him his lost condition, may he have joy and peace in believing that thy Son hath died for him, and that thou, for that Son's sake, hath accepted him. O God be with him through every period of his life, in every trial that awaits him, in the hour of death, and in the day of judgment, to deliver him from all that is evil, and finally to save him with an everlasting salvation; and grant to his parents the unspeakable happiness of uniting with him in the Church above, in the love and service of that Father, and that Son, and that Spirit, in whose name he was baptized in the Church below. Amen.

APPENDIX,

*Containing three letters to the same, concerning
the language of the Baptismal service.*

MY DEAR FRIEND :

Although I have in the foregoing letters given you, however briefly and imperfectly, the substance of what the Scriptures and the Prayer-Book enjoin and teach on the subject of the baptism and religious training of children, it may not be amiss to add a few remarks on the meaning of certain expressions in the baptismal office, which it is desirable you should use understandingly and heartily. They have given not a little trouble to some candid and conscientious persons, who are not satisfied with the mere ceremony of baptism, no matter in what way or with what words it be performed. At different times it has been proposed to vary or omit them, as not essential to the right administration of baptism ;

it has, however, never been done, and those who differ in sentiment on the subject alluded to in them, and as to the meaning of the expressions themselves, have continued to use them according to their own view of them.

There are some who speak very confidently in favour of their own interpretation, and even say it is impossible that any honest and sensible person can put other sense on these words than their own. Others, however, there are, not less wise, candid, and pious, who, though differing somewhat among themselves, yet cannot so plainly see that but one meaning may be put upon them. Thus it is with the Scriptures themselves. There are some very positive persons who are perfectly sure that they have the true key to the understanding of the most disputed passages and difficult subjects. Others more humble, and not without an opinion of their own, and that formed after much study, yet have doubt as to its infallibility, and see some force in the reasoning of others. It is a fact worthy of notice, that the points, whether in the Scriptures or in the standards of churches, about which there is much positiveness and intolerance on the part of some, are those which from their very nature are most hidden from the view of man, the secret things which belong to God, and fully to understand which

requires that we be wise above what is written. Such of necessity must be the question as to the operation of the Spirit on the infant mind, and the immediate effects thereof. Where has God revealed this unto us, or how can we ascertain it with certainty?

The disputed passages in our service to which I allude, are those which speak of the baptized, whether child or adult, as being regenerate or born again—not of water only, but of the Holy Ghost, so as to seem to affirm a certain positive moral change in the baptized at the time, and by the instrumentality of baptism. I would remark that the same expressions are to be found in the early liturgies, and in the writings of the fathers; and what should diminish our confidence in any opinion we may adopt as to the true meaning of the same as now used, is the well known fact that these fathers differed among themselves, not only as to the subjects as presented in Scripture, but as to the precise meaning and design of the same words as used in their liturgies. No wonder then that the same difference should still exist. It may be well also to state that these terms are to be found in the confessions of all the reformed churches in connexion with baptism, but have not attracted the same attention, or occasioned the same uneasiness, because not

brought into constant use in the administration of baptism as in our Church. Different views, however, have been entertained as to the proper interpretation of them. Such then having been the diversity of opinion from the time of the fathers to the present day, as to the meaning of the very same terms as used in baptism, it is not wonderful that some diversity should still continue.

In order to the more comfortable and edifying use of the service, and that your mind may not be offended by the terms employed on that interesting occasion, let me state what are the leading interpretations which may with safety and a good conscience be adopted, and what are untrue and dangerous in the opinion of the friend who addresses you.

1st. The first method of interpreting the term regeneration, is that which supposes it to refer to certain religious privileges and advantages assured to us in baptism, by the right use of which privileges we may, through God's grace, be renewed in the spirit of our minds, but which are not themselves that moral change. We are said to be regenerated because placed in the midst of such advantages. It is argued by the advocates of this view that the term regeneration is to be found in but two places of Scripture, and only in one of these in connexion with baptism, and then distinguished

from the renewal of the heart by the Spirit. In the Epistle of St. Paul to Titus, we are said to be saved “by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost ;” the former term being generally ascribed to baptism, or being born again of water, and the latter to the birth of the Spirit. It is therefore said that the term is to be understood in a lower sense than that in which many now understand it. They appeal in behalf of their view to the fact that other scriptural terms are certainly used in two senses, a higher and lower. The following are specimens. The Temple and the vessels thereof, and even the land of Judea, were called holy on account of the purposes to which they were consecrated, though no change took place in their material or substance, just as we call the water of baptism and the bread and wine of the Lord’s supper holy, although Protestants do not believe that any change takes place in their substance. The children of believing parents also are declared by St. Paul to be holy, because of their birth and the promise made to them. Certain privileges appertained to them, on account of which they were called holy, although they might never become holy in the high sense of that word. Again, in many places all the Israelites are called the people of God—the sons of God—the chosen people—the

children of the kingdom—children of Abraham—elect—beloved—to whom pertaineth the adoption. These titles are given to them in reference to the favours God had showed them—their separation from other nations—their circumcision—the Temple and Scriptures—on account of all which things, St. Paul says that their advantage and profit was “much every way.” In like manner it is argued, that the baptized are in the enjoyment of all Christian privileges, and may be called regenerate, the children of God, saints, and elect, &c.; and yet it may be only in a lower sense, that these terms are applied to them. It is affirmed, that in the Old Testament the same terms are used in a higher sense, when applied to the truly pious, who have improved their advantages. “All is not Israel,” we are told, “which is called Israel”—that is, not Israel in the higher sense of the word. Some of those called children, were “cursed children,” “rebellious children.” “If God were your Father, ye would love me,” said our Saviour, to some who were the sons of God, in one sense, but because they did the works of the devil, he tells them that they were “of their father the devil.” Amongst the Jews, as amongst the Christians, some there were who had only a name to live—only the form of godliness—only cried Lord, Lord, but did not his will. On the other

hand, we have descriptions of the true sons of God in language like the following: "He that doeth righteousness is born of God"—"every one that loveth is born of God"—"he that is born of God sinneth not." Now, these things cannot be said of all or most of the baptized. Therefore they must be said to be born of God, in another sense, so far as their baptism is a new birth. The true children of God are said to be "renewed in the spirit of their minds"—to have "new hearts and new spirits within them"—to have "the law written in their hearts"—to be the "temples of the Holy Ghost." But perhaps you will say the expression in the prayer, "that thou hast been pleased to regenerate this infant with thy Holy Spirit," is too strong to admit of having the lower sense put upon it. To this it is answered, that the phrase is still different from other passages which undoubtedly speak of a moral change, such as "renewed in the spirit of our minds"—having "new hearts and right spirits within us;" and that there may be a change effected in our religious privileges which may, however, not amount to making us "new creatures in Christ," though it may lead to it. The advocates for the lower sense put upon the passage, say that there is a distinction to be made between the gifts of the Holy Ghost and the Holy Ghost itself,

as dwelling in us and purifying our hearts. Thus, the gifts of tongues, of miracles, of prophesyings, were all from one and the same Spirit, but were not always accompanied by holy dispositions and habits wrought in the soul. The Holy Ghost, say they, seems to have been that person of the Trinity left in special charge of the Church after our Lord's personal presence was withdrawn, so that what was done by the Apostles and others, was said to be done by the Holy Ghost. It was the Holy Ghost which appointed ministers to be overseers of the churches, and especially presided at their ordination. Ordination was one of the gifts of the Holy Ghost, who intrusted the office of the ministry to certain persons; but they were not always filled with the Holy Ghost as to its sanctifying influences. The Apostolic Church itself furnished sad proofs that all who had the gifts of the Spirit, were not renewed in the spirit of their minds. Our Lord himself says, that some of them were workers of iniquity, and would be lost. Still they were in one sense, "men of God," as were all the prophets of old.

In favour of this view of the subject, an appeal is made to the service for the ordination of priests, in which there is a form which has these words put into the mouth of the Bishop when he confers the office: "Receive the Holy Ghost for the office

of a priest in the Church of God ;” wherein there seems to be a clear conveyance of the Holy Ghost itself to the candidate. But lest it should be so construed, another form was added explanatory of it, and which is, I believe, always used, viz. : “ Receive the office of a priest in the Church of God.” This shows that the Church considers that in bestowing the office, she bestows certainly one of the gifts of the Holy Ghost, though the person receiving the office should be as destitute of the spirit of holiness as Judas himself, who received the Apostleship from our Lord, or some of those who exercised certain gifts of the Spirit, but were evil men. This explanation of the form of conveying ordination, is therefore adduced in justification of the lower sense put upon the term “ regenerate by the Holy Ghost” in baptism.

Another reason urged in favour of the lower sense being put upon the term regenerate, is the identity between the services for adults and infants. Differing as the subjects do in age, capacity, and character, there is scarce any variation of language in the service, and none whatever in the thing prayed for and said to be received. Both are regenerated and born again, in some sense, in which they were not before. Now the adult is required to come to baptism with true faith and penitence,

such as none can have except he be renewed by the Holy Ghost ; he is also said to have been “made a child of God by faith in Christ,” although thanks are returned for him as for the infant, as “now being born again ;” a prayer having been before made that he “might be born again.” Since then, the same language is used to express the same effect in both the infant and the adult, and since the adult had experienced the moral change before, we must find some sense common to both, in which the words can be understood. Now, there are some things belonging to baptism which are common to both, and which neither had before. Neither of them had received the seal of the covenant, neither of them had been admitted to the fellowship of Christ’s Church, in the way of his appointment ; neither of them had received this kind of renewed assurance of pardon and all needed grace ; neither of them had made the kind of public confession required by our Lord, and thus received this outward and complete, though conditional, title to salvation. In the blessings then common to them both, it is said we must look for those things which are contained in the word regenerate, as applied to them both : except that to the adult there must be added what in one of our articles is said to be the atten-

dant of baptism, when faithful prayer is offered : viz., a confirmation of faith and increase of grace.

In answer to the question, do we pray only for the privileges supposed to belong to the lower sense of regeneration, and which are certainly the privileges of the baptized, it is replied, that the prayers used both before and after the baptism, do go beyond this ; they ask for grace through life ; they seek eternal life for the soul, but they do not thank God for all future grace as given, and for eternal life as though already received, but only for those things which are actually received.

It is furthermore adduced in favour of this interpretation of the words of the service, that whatever may be the true scriptural meaning of regeneration, and of kindred expressions, such as, born again, &c., a reference to the writings of the Fathers, the Reformers, and other standard writers, will show that the term was used by many of them in two senses, according to the subjects on which they were writing. If writing as to baptism and its blessings, especially when infants were the subjects, they used it in the lower sense ; but when applying it to the hearts and lives of adults, they used it in the higher sense, as the same with conversion, renewal of the mind, a new heart, &c. Therefore it is considered as proper to assign it the lower sense in the baptismal service.

The advocates for this understanding of the word also say it has this advantage, that it does not deny but God's spirit may exert some influence over the mind of the child, may vouchsafe some beginnings of grace, (though they dare not call it such a moral change as amounts to a new birth,) at any time God may think proper, whether before, at, or after baptism. It meddles not with that unknown subject. Having no means of ascertaining it, no sure promise on which to rest, it lets it alone. It prays for God's spirit, leaves it to his sovereign will to choose his own time for granting such aids, as shall during the life of the baptized, suffice for its salvation; and believing that he will do it in a wiser and better manner than if we were to appoint him a time and a mode when it must be done.

It is also affirmed that this view of the term is in accordance with the 27th Article, to which I would direct your attention, and with the teachings of the Catechism. In the latter, we are said to become at baptism, members of Christ—that is, of his body the Church into which we are grafted—children of God—that is, by entering his Church—entitled to all its privileges and advantages for becoming the sons of God by faith in Christ—also inheritors of the kingdom of Heaven—that is, we have an assurance of Heaven if we die in infancy, or should we

live to the age of discretion, if we fulfil what was promised in our baptism.

In the latter part of the Catechism, baptism with water in the name of the Trinity, is said to be a means whereby we receive the inward grace, which grace is “a death unto sin, and a new birth unto righteousness.” It does not say that it is *the means*, as if it were the only means of effecting a death unto sin, and a new birth unto righteousness, but *a* means, that is, one of many means appointed of God, and used of man for this purpose.* It does not say that it is appointed to produce the effect at the moment, as though nothing had been done towards it before, or must be done afterwards, but only that this ordinance rightly performed, received, and used, was appointed to contribute its part

* In the homily concerning the worthy receiving of the Lord’s Supper, it is said, “Our Lord and Saviour thought it not sufficient to purchase for us his Father’s favour again—which is that deep fountain of all goodness and eternal life—but also invented the ways most wisely whereby they might redound to our commodity and profit. *Amongst the which means*, is the public celebration of the memory of his precious death at the Lord’s table.” In previous homilies, other means had been spoken of, especially prayer and the use of God’s word.

The word or particle *the* is only used in an inclusive sense, in relation to one thing, and that is faith. “The first coming unto God is through faith,” are the first words of the homily on faith. In the homily for Good Friday, faith is repeatedly declared to be “the means of our salvation,” and in one place “the only instrument of our salvation.”

towards the destruction of sin, and the creation of righteousness in the soul of man. And surely, say they, whether it be an infant or adult who is baptized, it is well calculated to do this. It may do it in the pious adult by confirming his faith, and increasing his grace. It may do it to the infant whenever God's blessing attends the efforts of sponsors to improve his baptismal dedication, and when himself shall think upon his vows at any future period, and use his baptism a-right.

I have thus endeavored to set before you one of those views, which you may with a good conscience take of the part of our service which is objected to by some. This view interferes not at all with the absolute necessity of a genuine renovation of the heart, for it only asserts that the baptized have certain privileges, and promises, and aids, which lead to that, and bind it upon us as an indispensable requisite for Heaven, since, "without holiness no man can see the Lord."

In adopting this construction, you will have the sanction of many, whose opinion is deserving of your esteem.*

And now again commending you to the guidance of Heaven. I remain yours respectfully.

* The good old Bishop Hopkins of the Irish Church, has adopted and defended this view. Archbishop Tillotson not only advocates it and thinks that no one need have scruples

Second Mode of Interpretation.

MY DEAR FRIEND :

In this letter I shall place before you for consideration and choice, a second method of understanding the disputed passages in the baptismal service, and which has been adopted by wise and pious ministers, and members of our Church. These say that the first method is good as far as it goes,

as to using the Episcopal service, but maintains that the Continental Churches thus understood baptismal regeneration as used in their confessions.

Many of the old English divines, as also of the more modern, may be classed with the above.

In the American Episcopal Church I might mention Bishops Griswold and Hobart, the latter of whom has maintained it in various publications, but especially in his explanation of the Church Catechism. The fullest and clearest exhibition of it, however, may be seen in a little volume entitled, "Regeneration," by the late Bishop of Pennsylvania. To these there should be added the fact, that in the General Convention, 1836, the Bishops proposed certain changes in the confirmation service, having in view the correction of injurious misapprehensions as to the meaning of certain terms in that office, bearing on this very subject of baptismal regeneration. The object and effect of those changes would have been to establish this view as the sense of the Church in America. But though the changes were passed unanimously by the Bishops, and by a large majority of the lower house, it was deemed advisable by Bishop Hobart, the mover of them, to withdraw the same, as they were connected with other proposed changes in the service, which gave dissatisfaction to many in the Church.

but that it stops short of the full meaning of the words ; that the word regeneration does indeed include all these privileges of the baptized—these conditional blessings promised—that sealing of the covenant, and union with the visible Church which are ascribed to it, but that it also comprehends yet more. They are afraid to understand the word regeneration, whether as used in the Bible or prayer-book in any lower sense, than as embracing a change of the inward man. They think therefore that in all cases where it, or similar terms are used in the prayer-book, an inward and spiritual grace is prayed for, and the gift of it made the subject of thanksgiving. They acknowledge themselves, however, at once to be met with a very formidable difficulty in the admitted fact, that so many infants and adults are baptized, who never give the slightest evidence of a gracious influence, having been exerted over their souls, and of any moral change having taken place. So far from this, adults have come to it with no holier motives than Simon Magus—that is—in very hypocrisy and sin, while innumerable infants have been brought to it in the most careless and prayerless manner, and from the earliest developments of character have manifested nothing but the temper and conduct of children of the evil one. How then are we to believe that the Church

would thus speak, and speak unto God in the language of thanksgiving for what she knows in many instances cannot exist, and which may mislead the minds of men in a matter of such importance ?

To this it is replied, that the Church would not have ventured on such a mode of speech without high authority, even that of sacred writers, especially the inspired apostles. They say that if we look into the Epistles addressed to the Churches, which were even then composed of the evil as well as the good, we find them, while on some occasions warning the evil, yet at others writing as though all were saints, elect, beloved ; thanking God for them all as such, in the spirit of that charity which “hopeth all things,” and which received each one’s profession as a sincere exposition of the heart, leaving it to the Searcher of all hearts to determine who were the faithful.

At any rate whether the Church has acted wisely or not, in thus copying after the language of the apostles in their epistles to the first churches, it is affirmed to be a fact that she has so done, not in the baptismal service only, but throughout the Prayer Book, especially in her offices. In proof of which, they say, that if we open it at the morning service we find it entitled “a general confession to be said by the *whole congregation after the minister, all*

kneeling," in which confession none but penitent believers can truly unite; the minister having addressed them all as *dearly beloved brethren*, in the apostle's words. All the other parts of the service, too, are the expressions of faith, hope, charity, thanksgiving, desire which only the faithful can feel; and in the close all are called on in the prayer of St. Chrysostom, to say "Almighty God, who hast given us grace at this time, with one accord to make our common supplications unto Thee," which words, together with the whole prayer, but ill accord with the state of mind of too many usually present in our assemblies. Proceeding to the communion office, they say, we see in it one of the most penitential as well as rapturous services ever used by man in his approaches to God, one in which saints on earth join with angels and archangels in heaven, in praising God, and which concludes with a thanksgiving to God for having fed them "with the spiritual food of the most precious body and blood of Christ." All this is appointed to be used by every communicant, all being considered as having duly received it, although there be so many unworthy ones, who, in our article, are said "in nowise to be partakers of Christ's body and blood."

Passing by, for the present, the baptismal service, the meaning of which is in dispute, they bid us

turn to the Catechism for instruction which is to be understood and felt by those who come to confirmation, and where all who repeat it heartily thank God for having brought them "to this state of salvation," and profess a belief in Christ as their Redeemer, and the Holy Ghost as one "who sanctifieth them and all the people of God," although so many who repeat these professions are so far from realizing them.

Proceeding to the office of Confirmation we are directed to the fact that it is for the use of those who have realized the faith and penitence promised in baptism, so that the Bishop can now say over them, not merely that God had "regenerated them by water and the Holy Ghost," but had granted unto them "*the forgiveness of all their sins*," which must refer to pardon up to the present time; moreover, he prays for an increase of the manifold gifts of grace, "of the spirit of wisdom and understanding, of counsel and ghostly strength, of knowledge and true godliness;" all which must be already possessed or they could not be increased. And then the Bishop, putting his hands on the head of each, pronounces him either *a child*, or *servant of God*, and prays that he may continue such forever, and daily increase in the Holy Spirit more and more. It is sad to think how untrue these words are of

many who are confirmed, and yet they must all be used, though the Church well knew that they would be used in some instances over unworthy persons, to whom similar words had been untruly applied in their baptism.* I will mention only one other instance to which they refer, and that is to a passage in the burial service, as found in the English Prayer Book, and they say that *it* is a proper authority for deciding the principle of interpretation, as it was drawn up at the same time and by the same persons who adopted the language of the baptismal service. In that service as to every one who is buried, thanks are returned to God "that it hath pleased him to deliver this, *our brother*, out of the miseries of this sinful world," and the hope is elsewhere expressed that "he rests in Christ." This, say they, is language most untrue of numbers over whose graves it is uttered. So offensive was it to many, that it was omitted in the American Prayer Book and more general expressions substituted. Such being the case with some other offices in the Prayer Book, it is asked, why may not the same principle have led to the use of the strong

* In the ordination of Priests, after the solemn promises made by the candidate, the Bishop affirms positively of every one that "God hath given them a good will to do all these things."

language in the baptismal service, without supposing that the Church meant positively and absolutely to affirm the moral regeneration of every baptized child and adult, any more than the genuine piety of every member, of every congregation, who receives the Lord's Supper, and is confirmed, or, in England, has the burial service used over him. As to the baptismal service itself, they say, that in the form publicly acknowledging private baptism, the Church goes so far in her use of positive affirmations as to say, not only that God hath "favorably received the present infant—hath embraced him with the arms of his mercy," but "as he hath promised in his holy word, *will give unto him the blessing of eternal life, and make him partaker of his everlasting kingdom;*"* for she affirms this without reservation or exception, they say, of every child who is baptized? Can she mean to say that every such child will certainly be saved when so many live and die impenitent and unbelieving. If it be said that the Church surely cannot be guilty of such inconsistency as to affirm what she does not believe, that is the moral regeneration of every child and adult coming to baptism,

* In the early English service it is much stronger, "that he *hath* given unto him the blessing of eternal life, and *made* him partaker of his everlasting kingdom."

excusing herself on the plea that in the judgment of charity she does it, they ask, whether in this she is guilty of deviating from strict truth more than, when, with the best intentions, she represents little children as making promises, though they cannot speak and are unconscious of all that is passing. Her language in the Catechism, baptismal, and confirmation services is very strong and clear in declaring that the child makes the promises and is held bound to perform them as made by himself, time being allowed for the performance. In the primitive Church it was still stronger, and sounded yet more strangely.—In answer to the question, "*Does this child believe!*" it was replied by the sponsor, "*he does believe,*" and so as to the other questions. St. Augustine has a long explanation and justification of this mode of speech, acknowledging however that it was not to be understood literally.

The advocates for this mode of expression, proceed next to show that though this is the Church's manner of speaking in many of her services, yet that she no more meant to affirm the actual regeneration of every baptized adult or child, every one confirmed or communicating, than St. Paul meant to affirm, that all were certainly renewed in their hearts whom he calls saints, &c. In proof of this,

they appeal to all her warnings against unworthy participation, the pains she takes to have them well prepared, the very prayers she offers up, which of themselves show that there is some doubt as to the reception of the grace, as we do not pray for what we have, or certainly shall have in such language as she uses. Above all, they adduce the positive doctrine of the articles, that in those only who receive the sacraments worthily have they a wholesome effect. Of course, to be consistent with herself, she must say that no moral effect can take place in those who receive them unworthily. As to adults, this is scarce denied by any. But as to infants it is said, there being no bar or hindrance in their minds, all must partake of it worthily, and therefore efficaciously. To this it is replied, that the Church no where makes any distinction as to age, or affirms that all infants receive baptism worthily, there being no bar in them, but declares as to both the sacraments, that they must be rightly and worthily received, or else they have no wholesome effect, but on the contrary are injurious. That infants and their baptism must be included, they prove from the fact that at the time the articles were drawn up, almost all were baptized in infancy, not even a service for adult baptism being prepared till long after. What is said, therefore, on unworthy

receiving of the sacraments, must have been meant for infants as well as adults. As to the assertion that there is no bar in the characters of infants to the worthy, and therefore efficacious receiving of baptism, it is asked how can that be, when they bring a corrupt nature into the world, when original sin is declared in one of our articles to be “a fault and corruption of nature which deserves God’s wrath and damnation.” If asked what then constitutes the worthiness of infants which shall make baptism have a wholesome operation on any of them, they reply thus: 1st. God may in the case of some infants choose to give the first disposition to holiness, the beginnings of grace before baptism, which shall make them meet to be partakers of more grace, as perhaps John the Baptist had from his birth, and of course before his circumcision. This, however, being a thing incapable of proof, is not so positively asserted. 2ndly. They say, that if we examine our baptismal service and Catechism, we shall find a peculiar reason for the baptism of infants, which may serve as a key to explain her doctrine as to the manner and time of its efficacy on those baptized in infancy. In the 27th Article, the reason why the baptism of infants should be retained, is “because it is most agreeable to the institution of Christ;” but in the Catechism, instead of simply affirming this, it is

said, that though faith and repentance are the required qualifications for baptism, yet infants, unable as they are to perform them, are baptized, because *“they promise them both by their sureties, which promise when they come to age themselves are bound to perform.”* Here then we have the reason adduced by the Church, not said to be affirmed in Scripture, but her own reason, viz., the promise—the supposed, or imputed, and accepted promise, instead of the actual performance at the time. A period is allowed and appointed for its fulfilment. If they then make good their promise, they were worthy partakers, if not, then unworthy. However strange, even contradictory, it may seem, to suppose their present worthiness or unworthiness to be determined by some thing that is yet to be, or not to be, it is not more so than to suppose and represent them as now making a profession, which they can only do at some future day. It is therefore affirmed that the Church goes, on the supposition, that the present time is transferred during the service to the future, and that the children themselves make promises, as if they were of age, and she receiving them as sincere, returns thanks by anticipation for those who make them, as being God’s true children, though she is so often doomed to disappointment. That little children coming to baptism were re-

garded by the primitive Church in the same light as adult converts from Paganism, that they were examined and baptized alike is a well known fact.

In proof that such is the meaning of our service, its advocates adduce the fact, that in the writings of the early reformers which are now more and more consulted, it does appear that they speak much of the worthy and unworthy receiving of both the sacraments, although baptism was administered almost always to infants. One not knowing this latter fact, and reading what they say on the subject, would be apt sometimes to suppose that baptism was then as generally received by adults as the Lord's Supper, and that many were upbraided with the unworthy receiving of it. But in the case of the sacrament of baptism, they must often have alluded to infants, who are supposed to have received it either worthily or unworthily. Each of the above views of worthy and unworthy receiving baptism seems to have been entertained. Some of the early reformers speak of children as actually having the spirit—having faith—either really, or imputed to them, as being members of the Church, as being inwardly sanctified, and all this before baptism, and as constituting their title to baptism, which only set forth and sealed what they had before, as in the case of an adult. Others again wrote as if their

worthiness and the efficacy of their baptism depended upon their conduct when they were come to the age when these promises were to be fulfilled ; the thanksgiving for their new birth being by anticipation, and in reference to that time. In addition to the above reason in favor of this second mode of understanding the baptismal service, it is asserted, that if there be any one thing more prominent than another in the whole history of the reformation, it is the protest against the doctrine of Rome, that the sacraments were efficacious, independent of the disposition of the recipients, and that, as to those in whose behalf the Church returns thanks for a gracious blessing attending their baptism, it must be, either that God had previously prepared the hearts of children for the worthy reception of it, or that it would take place when they came to years of discretion.

In the last place, amongst the many authorities quoted in favor of this sense, they adduce the testimony of the twelve Bishops in the Savoy conference, who were appointed to meet with an equal number of Presbyterian divines, in order to see if some changes in the service could not be agreed upon, which might reconcile their differences.

Amongst the objections of the Presbyterian divines was this ; that “ throughout the several offices (of the prayer-book,) the phrase is such as presumes

all persons within the communion of the Church to be regenerated, converted, and in an actual state of grace"—particularly did they object to the term regenerated by God's Holy Spirit, being applied "to *every child* in baptism." In reply to this, the twelve Bishops say that the Church in her prayers uses no more offensive phrase than St. Paul does when he wishes to the Corinthians, Galatians, and others, calling them in general Churches of God—sanctified in Christ Jesus, by vocation, saints." So say they, "Our prayers, and the phrase of them, surely supposes no more than that they are saints by calling, and sanctified in Christ Jesus, by their baptism admitted into Christ's congregation." They say both the Apostles and the Church speak thus in the judgment of charity concerning all, both the evil and the good.

I think it proper to add, that some of the most wise expositors of our formularies, as of the Scriptures, have found it necessary at times to resort to each of these keys for unlocking the meaning of such passages in the Bible and prayer-book, although they may all have supposed that one or the other was chiefly to be used, and may have differed sometimes as to the passages to which they should be applied.

If, therefore, my friend, you prefer this understanding of the passages under consideration, to the former, you will find yourself in good company. A large number of pious and learned divines of our Church, have adopted it as the safest and best. All the great doctrines of the Reformation are held in connexion with it, and a high degree of holiness marks the character of its advocates, who, though not undertaking to affirm that the Church has adopted the best possible method of declaring the truth which she holds, yet say, that it is much easier to see the imperfection of this, than to propose a better.*

Yours truly.

* Amongst those who of late years have espoused it, may be mentioned Mr. Scott, son of the commentator, who distinguished himself in his controversy with Bishop Mant, Mr. Gorham in his recent controversy with the Bishop of Exeter, Mr. McNeile, Bickersteth, Budd, Bridges, and William Goode.

It is due to truth to state, that if the passages quoted above from the twelve Bishops, justify the Church in using language which can only be understood as the language of charity, and so far sustains the advocates of the second mode of interpretation, they also seem to favor the first mode, and to represent regeneration, in such like phrases, as being used sometimes in a lower sense.

Third Method of Interpretation.

MY DEAR FRIEND:

In this my last letter, I shall lay before you the views of a third class of interpreters of the service, of which, however, I cannot say that you may adopt them with safety, as I believe they have done and are doing much evil, and can neither be sustained by the Bible or prayer-book. This class goes beyond both the former in the efficacy they ascribe to baptism, and the meaning they attach to the words of the service, and are not only very positive in their opinions, but very offensive in their language towards those who differ from them, denouncing such as dishonest, and wondering how any other sense can be put upon the words than their own, extravagant as it is. I can only say if theirs be the only sense that is admissible, long since would the terms have been modified, or the Church have been greatly thinned. If their's be the true sense, and those holding other and very opposite views deserve to be excluded from the Church and its ministry, as some speak, then ought an overwhelming majority of the bishops and clergy and lay-members ever since the Reformation to

have been excommunicated as heretical, or dishonest. These persons, though differing among themselves on some points, agree in this, that there is an inward and spiritual grace invariably attendant on the administration of baptism with water, in the name of the Trinity, called regeneration,—and which never does or can go before, or follow after baptism, but is effected by God's Spirit in, and through baptism. They do make an exception as to adults, who come in hypocrisy and unbelief, but as to infants, the effects say they are uniform and invariable, because there is no opposition in their minds to the operation of baptismal grace. Some of them only make this regeneration to consist of what is called a seed, a principle, or power implanted in baptism, and always implanted, though it may not always be quickened into life and action, or if it is, is nevertheless soon destroyed by neglect or evil influences. One of the most prominent of the modern advocates of this doctrine,* affirms that before baptism, man being under the influence of a corrupt nature and the evil spirit, cannot have any just conception of moral relations, but in baptism he is regenerated and the moral powers rectified, so that now, by the means of education in the Church, he can become all that is re-

* Mr. Sewell in his work on Christian Morals.

quired. According to this theory, our natural powers and affections, no matter what other advantages they may possess, cannot understand what is right, until they are rectified in baptism. Some others consider the regeneration to consist in a kind of incarnation into Christ, in much the same way as the Romanists maintain that we do by partaking of the other sacrament. When it is said that by baptism we become members of Christ, they understand not that we become members of the Church, which, in a certain sense, is his body,—his mystical body—but of Christ himself; being in Christ, just as much as a sound living branch is part of the parent stock. Others consider that justification is as indissolubly connected with baptism as it is with faith, that even an adult, no matter how penitent and believing, and holy he has been for years before his baptism, is not justified until he has washed away his sins in the water of baptism, and that every child is completely justified in baptism. Of course it is maintained that all children thus rectified in their moral powers, and having this seed of grace in their hearts, thus justified and accepted of God, are to be regarded and treated as such, that is, as God's children in the highest sense. They must by a proper care be thus kept, and not allowed to fall from grace. It is affirmed of some that they

have so kept their baptismal grace, so cherished the seed within them, and used their rectified moral powers as to need no repentance, no other renewal of God's grace, although such assurances of repentance are made for them at baptism. It has been even asserted that some have preserved their baptismal robe so white and spotless, that the angels appointed to watch over them, have no cause for even a blush on their account before the throne of God. In perfect conformity with the above mentioned views, as to the efficacy of baptism for producing that change in our nature, and that reconciliation with God, without which salvation is impossible, and as to the necessary union of these things with baptism as to time and administration, you will also find that there are some who express themselves more or less doubtful as to the salvation even of infants dying without it, as if God could not prepare children for Heaven without the water of baptism. I need not say to you, my dear friend, how seriously such views must affect our estimate of the character of children, and the proper mode of dealing with them,—what a change it must make in our understanding of the doctrine of justification as contained in the Bible, and set forth in our articles; of repentance and faith as solemnly promised at the baptism of every child, and absolutely

required of every candidate for confirmation and the Lord's supper, by the Church, and for Heaven itself, by Christ, who keeps the door thereof. It is true that the advocates of this doctrine, of the invariable moral regeneration of every subject of baptism at the time of its administration, defend themselves from the charge of holding the Romish doctrine of what is called the *opus operatum*, that is, the effect being produced by the very rite itself, by saying that it is God's Spirit which does it, not the water of baptism; but it is well known that only ignorant Romanists maintain that the water does it, the more intelligent ascribing it to God's Spirit, only affirming that it always does it at the time and by the agency of baptism. But is there not a serious objection to the belief that God has bound himself to produce such a great moral change in every child just at one particular time, and by the agency of a particular ceremony, when the time too is to be just when man chooses to use the agency, and when man may perform the act in the most careless and irreverent manner, may put it off from time to time, from year to year, just to suit his convenience, and may then, instead of holy vows and promises from godly persons, have the most ungodly to take part in it. Is this fulfilling the Scripture—"The wind bloweth where it listeth,

and we hear the sound thereof, but know not whence it cometh or whither it goeth, and so is every one that is born of the spirit." Is this "being born not of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God?" Does it not seem rather that the parent may determine not only the time when the new birth shall take place, by appointing the time of its baptism, but whether it shall take place at all during its minority, by neglecting its baptism? Is not this too much like being born of the will of man when he can thus dictate the time? As to their mode of reasoning, that because God has said we must be born of water and of the spirit, therefore the two must take place at the same time, and in the act of baptism, what can be more illogical and contrary to the whole analogy of faith? Why not say that because it is declared we must believe and be baptized; believe with our hearts and confess with our mouths, do, as well as hear, in order to salvation, that these things must all take place at one and the same moment, when from their very nature there must be more or less difference as to time and place? Why should an effect be ascribed to baptism, though regularly administered and amidst faithful prayers, which is not assigned to God's own word? We are said to be born again of God's word—sanctified by the truth:—the word is declared

to be the power of God to the salvation of the soul ; by the foolishness of preaching God saves those that believe ; but how many read it, and hear it faithfully preached, and are not born again of it, at the time, or ever after ; why ? because it is not mixed with faith ; because they are not doers of it ; therefore it has no effect and returns unto God void, though he sent it forth to produce effect. Sometimes, indeed, the word of God which is the very thing the Scriptures speak of as seed in the hearts of man, does lay there for a long time after being planted by the hand of the parent, and yet at length springs up and bears fruit.

We must therefore believe that this attempt to tie God's blessing, and especially when making it such a great and indispensable one, to the moment and act of baptism is an interference with his sovereignty, which must displease him. He has in his great goodness appointed various agencies, and will work by them all during the course of our lives, when and as he chooses, and yet so as to silence any complaint on our part. There is one instrument, however, by which we certainly become his children in the highest sense, and that is when with faith and penitence we embrace his son Jesus Christ. Those who in riper years come to baptism in the service prescribed by our Church, come

thus, “being made the children of God, and of the light by faith in Jesus Christ,” and therefore if they are said to be “*born again and made heirs of salvation*” in their baptism also, it can only mean, that they are thus publicly declared to be so, by admission into the Church, by having God’s promises sealed unto them and their faith, and grace confirmed and increased by that ordinance. As to children, whatever spiritual influences they may receive at an early age, when they shall have fulfilled the conditions of their baptism, and shall have come to the knowledge and faith of Christ, they also shall be God’s true children without doubt. Justified by faith they shall have peace with God ; having experienced a death unto sin, and a new birth unto righteousness, remission of sins by spiritual regeneration, and become new creatures in Christ, which is evidenced by their walking in newness of life. Should they die before they come to know good and ill, and to be accountable for their choice, we may confidently intrust their souls unto God as unto a faithful Creator, and we need not be afraid of letting them fall into the hands of that Saviour who died for them, and who while on earth showed such tender love to little children.

NOTE.

It has been supposed by some that the Church of England in one of her rubrics, countenances some doubt as to the salvation of unbaptized infants, by expressing her conviction that those who are baptized and die before the commission of actual sin, will certainly be saved. It may be wise to trace this rubric to its source. In the preface to the Confirmation service put forth in the reign of king Edward, 1549, it is forbidden that any should be confirmed but those who were instructed in the Church Catechism attached to it, and which is the same we now use, except the questions on the sacraments, which were added in the reign of James the First. The candidates were to be "*of perfect age*," "agreeably with the usage of the Church in times past"—that is, before the Romish corruption. The above, and indeed the whole Preface was aimed at the doctrine and practice of the Romish Church, as to confirmation, which was administered to infants at the time of their baptism, and declared to be essential to the efficacy and completeness of baptism,—that without it the Spirit was not given, and the child must suffer, perhaps might be lost. The Reformers protested against this doctrine, and maintained that, from the first, confirmation was a personal confession "with one's own mouth and consent," of what was vowed in baptism, and was not necessary to the salvation of a child dying in infancy. The Preface concludes thus, "And that no man shall think that *any detriment* shall come to children from deferring of their confirmation, he shall know for truth, that it is certain by God's word, that children being baptized (if they depart out of this life in their infancy,) are undoubtedly saved." Here we have the true and express design of the rubric. The positive affirmation of the undoubted salvation of baptized children was not intended to cast doubt on the salvation of such as died unbaptized, but was manifestly levelled against the corrupt Romish doctrine, that without their infant confirmation and its attendant ceremonies, the child was only

half baptized, and might be lost. The Church bids parents and others have no fear of this, even if the child died without their unwarranted addition to baptism. One or two expressions in the articles and homilies may receive some light from this passage.

The rubric of the later English Prayer-book affirming the salvation of all baptized children dying in infancy, has been left out of the American Prayer-book. Bishop White says, "It has been left out, perhaps unnecessarily, lest it should seem impliedly to countenance the notion that unbaptized infants are not saved." Bishop White believed that as it stood in the English Prayer-book it was designed to imply no such doubt. He himself strongly protests against the entertainment of any such doubt. See page 17 of his Lectures on the Church Catechism.

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